

The First Principles

Class 1 • The Two Extremes

- Why do we need to determine what the “First Principles” are anyway?
 - Why don’t we just say that “The Bible” is what we believe?
- The first five words of the Bible are a good example of why we can’t just hold up this book, and say, “This is what you have to believe to be saved”.

“In the beginning, God created...”
- “In the beginning”
 - Some would say that the earth is JUST 6,000 years old. No older. Period. It was created at the time of Adam and Eve, to look older than it is, and we can trace back Adam and Eve’s ancestry to about 6,000 years ago.
 - Others would say that the earth is very old. It was created tens of thousands, maybe millions of years ago... They will quote the original Hebrew, which implies “Originally, God created...” There are differing theories on whether or not it set vacant for many years, or maybe even that there were entire worlds of people that lived before Adam, and they were destroyed (or made angels) and that the only part that concerns us is from Adam on, so that is all we are given...
 - So... In the first three words of the bible, we have RADICALLY differing “opinions” on what is meant by “In the beginning”.
- “God created”
 - Allows for no differing of opinion...
 - Either God created us, or he didn’t...
 - Either you believe in Creation or Evolution
- We remain “In Fellowship” with people who hold radically different opinions on some topics, but are very restrictive about what they believe on others...
- Those are the “First Principles”

- “First Principles” are the set of beliefs that you are required to understand and believe before your baptism is valid, and you are eligible for salvation.

- Acts 2:36-42

- 36) Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.
- 37) Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?
- 38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- 39) For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.
- 40) And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.
- 41) Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.
- 42) And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

- Acts 8:4-12

- 4) Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.
- 5) Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.
- 6) And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.
- 7) For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.
- 8) And there was great joy in that city.
- 9) But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:
- 10) To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.
- 11) And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.
- 12) But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

- Acts 18:4-11

- 4) And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
- 5) And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.
- 6) And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.
- 7) And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.
- 8) And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.
- 9) Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:
- 10) For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.
- 11) And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

- A “Statement of Faith” is not just a list of the First Principles...

- It has to contain the First Principles, but contains other information as well:

- First Principles are the Doctrines essential to salvation
- These Doctrines are the ones that you need to believe before baptism
- Your Statement of Faith should contain these Doctrines

- Most of the First Principles are in the Statement of Faith, but it also contains much other helpful exposition. Exposition that is profitable for us to know...

- But, not necessarily First Principles

- There are a **LOT** of things that you **CAN'T** believe in order to be saved also... These are sometimes called, “Doctrines to be Rejected”, and we are not going to get into them. We are going to concentrate, just on the positive... The things you need to know to get you saved.

- There are also a lot of other things that you if you don't believe you risk your salvation, even though they aren't necessarily First Principles...

- Like, for example... “I think that it's okay to murder.”

- “I think that Jesus was a woman.”

- These are things that are clearly, and simply wrong. One of the primary First Principles that we will discover is that the Bible is True. If that is so, then you have to believe it when it says that you can't murder, and Jesus was a man, etc.
- So, if a person believed all of the First Principles, but honestly thought that Fornication was an acceptable lifestyle, then in essence, they would be rejecting one of the primary First Principles, and they would be endangering their salvation, and our our fellowship with them.
- So, how do we define what the First Principles are?
- To define First Principles biblically, we must ask...
 - “What is it that makes some doctrines essential, and others not?”
- There are basically two different types of topics in the Word of God:
 - Matters of exposition on which a difference of opinion is tolerated - Should be!
 - Fundamentals of our faith where it is critical that we call believe the same
- There are two extremes in approaches to defining First Principles...
 - Clarifying them will help us in determining the proper approach
- **#1** • Many Christians will tell you that if you believe in Jesus, you will be saved.
 - That's it. It's that simple.
 - And the scriptural proof is easy also... **ASK THIS**
 - John 3:16
 - 16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
 - **HANDOUT** - The First Extreme then, is “Almost Nothing”
- **#2** • In response to this wrong approach, some people say,
 - “All of the Bible must be believed in order to be saved”...

- Of course, what they mean is, **ASK THIS**

“You have to believe everything that I believe, nothing less...”

- **HANDOUT** - The Second Extreme is, “Almost Everything”
- BOTH are wrong... and we see tendencies of both these approaches in our body...
- Obviously, not at the extreme ends, but along the same paths...
- How do we find “middle ground”?

- Robert Roberts is helpful in the *Ecclesial Guide*:

“How far ought we to go and where ought we to stop... in our demands on our fellow believers?”

Men of God are afraid on the one hand of compromising the truth in fellowship; and on the other, of sinning against the weaker members of the body of Christ. The only end there can be to this embarrassment is found in the discrimination between true principles and uncertain details that do not overthrow them.”

- Robert Roberts, “True Principles and Uncertain Details”, *The Christadelphian*, May 1898, Page 182

- I’m going to tell you right now, that the Bible does NOT state what a First Principle is, nor does it tell us what criteria we should apply to determine what one is...

- Our definition of a First Principle...

“The set of beliefs that you are required to understand and believe before your baptism is valid, and you are eligible for salvation”

- Is *IMPLICIT* in scripture, NOT *explicit*... We hope to show that...
- The only way that I can think of approaching this topic is to look at some lists of items that the scriptures call “First Principles...” To keep track of them, and compare them to one another, and develop an “index” of sorts to First Principles. Then, after looking at enough scriptures, we should have a fairly complete index. We can then compare our own “index” to some statements of others, and ultimately, to our own Statement of Faith.
- We are not attempting to study and understand **WHAT** the First Principles are. Nor, are we going to give exhaustive lists of every verse necessary to fully understand each First Principle. We are simply trying to make a LIST, so we can see a pattern emerge as to what the First Principles are.

- We aren't even going to attempt to find ALL of the First Principles. I'll tell you right now that I think there are 20. In our studies this weekend, we are only going to get to 17... But it will show you how to go about it.
- We will glean this list of First Principles from:
 - The Gospel Record
 - The Apostles Lectures in Acts
 - Paul's "Faithful Sayings" in his letters
 - The Seven Unities in Ephesians
- 1st Corinthians 3:1
 - 1) And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.
- Don't worry if you feel like a "babe"...
 - An idea that is never really stated, but sometimes comes through is...
 - "The same knowledge that the 'fathers' possessed is required of us"
 - It is unreasonable to expect that babes in Christ will have the same knowledge as a Brother who has been learning for 30, 40 even 50 years...
- Applying a "test of fellowship", or "Statement of Faith" that excludes the babes in Christ is clearly going to far...
- We are going to make a strong effort during this study to strive for simplicity...
 - The difference between,

"What you need to know, versus everything that you do know..."